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ABSTRACT

Professional development opportunities must offer a learning environment that creates a nurturing, creative, successful atmosphere for the learners. Instructional design models, learning styles, and technology implementation strategies impact this supportive environment. This paper discusses the importance of such a learning environment for professional development of preservice and inservice instructors. Suggestions include multiple-session technology classes and providing authentic learning situations in training for using technology. (MES)

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Title: Supporting the Professional Development of Preservice and Inservice Instructors: Aspects Toward a Nurturing, Creative Learning Environment

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Supporting the Professional Development of Preservice and Inservice Instructors: Aspects Toward a Nurturing, Creative Learning Environment

Abstract: Professional development opportunities must offer a learning environment that creates a nurturing, creative, successful atmosphere for the learners. Instructional design models, learning styles and technology implementation strategies impact this supportive environment.

Introduction

The careful development of a learning environment is imperative towards the success of all learners within a classroom of eager, and perhaps not-so-eager, learners. This is obvious to all professionals within the realm of instruction. However, the thought and care that is focused upon developing a nurturing, creative learning environment for PreK-12 learners may not always be taken with preservice and inservice teacher educators; after all, many professional educators remain so focused upon the PreK-12 learners that we "miss the forest for the trees", so to speak. Preservice and inservice teacher educators also desire and deserve a supportive, nurturing, creative learning environment within the professional development opportunities.

Professional development opportunities that focus upon instructional uses of technology are examples of environments in which a nurturing, supportive atmosphere will aid the preservice and inservice teacher educators in developing a level of comfort with technology and, slowly, move towards the appropriate and successful integration of technology within their classroom. Numerous aspects lead towards a supportive, nurturing atmosphere in which the creativity and love of learning will present itself; but what specific aspects will aid the professional development opportunities when working with technology? Technology-phobic preservice and inservice teacher educators abound within the education profession but, with appropriate care and guidance, the technology-phobic can become the technology-savvy, learner-centered facilitator in the classroom.

Creating a Supportive, Nurturing and Creative Learning Environment

The fact remains that teachers must attend professional technology development. To embrace technology, teachers must have positive attitudes toward it. It is imperative that instructional technology trainers supply a supportive and nurturing environment. One way to foster a supportive environment is to offer multiple-session technology classes. Technology programs in school districts must no longer take the "treat 'em and street 'em" type philosophy where teachers are required to attend one-day workshops. The danger of one-day workshops is the tendency for educators to not use the newly learned technology. In a survey dispensed to an elementary school in the Houston metropolitan area, 89% of the teachers surveyed admitted that they did not use the technology after taking the one-day technology workshop. The same survey also illustrated 75% of those teachers appeared dissatisfied or

somewhat dissatisfied with the technology professional development training that they had received. Ehley (1992) found that teachers require multi-session workshops in order to feel successful with the computer. One-day technology workshops have a tendency to leave teachers feeling isolated and frustrated. By breaking up the technology training into three to six learnable sessions, teachers appear less anxious about the computer and can concentrate on the material. In addition, multiple training sessions let teachers learn smaller chunks of material at a time for faster acquisition of the skill.

Another positive component of multiple training sessions is the fostering of relationships between fellow teachers. This bond can reduce feelings of anxiety and frustration and help create a supportive environment for all technology users. The bond can even continue to blossom after the training sessions have ended. The Intel Corporation has just unleashed a successful teaching technology program called, "Teach to the Future" in which an underlying belief that support for teachers does not end after finishing the 40-hour training modules is apparent. Further, Intel has created a lesson plan bank and listserv for all Intel participants to study and use. Through the implementation of supportive, nurturing, creative learning enviornments and longitudinal time elements that enhance the learner's acquisition of relevant knowledge and implementation skills, the success of the learning environment can be significantly heightened.

Instructional Uses of Technology

Teachers' attitudes toward technology and computers vary widely in any give school. If teachers see the introduction of computers into their subject as bringing curriculum change with it, they may react in different ways. While some may adopt a resistant attitude to this

change, others may see the change as a cure for boredom and see themselves as innovators (Bennet 1980). In addition, attitudes not only affect choices but also can be unconsciously transferred to students through modeling (Martin 1986). Proving teachers with quality instructional uses of technology is an important step in giving teachers sufficient opportunities to acquire and learn technology for the classroom.

One way to show teachers how to use technology is give them authentic learning situations in their training. For example, one technology specialist sits down with a school group, team, or individual and identifies a teacher's technology needs. After the initial meeting, the specialist then proceeds to build a CTP or a Classroom Technology Plan for the teacher. In the CTP a list of technology goals are listed along with the real authentic products that will be produced. Real and authentic learning activities are crucial in developing a successful learning environment. Knowles (1984) was one of the first researchers to identify the importance of real and authentic learning situations in adult learning. Knowles felt that adults are motivated to learn after they experience a need in their real-life situation, because adults do not learn for the sake of learning they learn in order to be able to perform a task or solve a problem. To apply Knowles' theory in education, instead of showing teachers how to use spreadsheets by opening up a program and exploring the interface, a better instructional use would be to create a teacher gradebook. Creating a teacher gradebook is a real and authentic product that the teacher can take back into the classroom and use. The instructional uses of technology are ever expanding; however, the appropriate and successful integration of technology into the learning environment is imperative.

Conclusions

A technological revolution is under way that involves teachers. In considering the role of technology in learning, educators are faced with a number of challenges, including how to respond to technology and how to utilize it without diminishing the learning experiences (Field, 1997). The time has come to prepare our nation's educators with quality, supportive, and nurturing learning environments to learn the technology skills they so desperately need.

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